IN THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (Currently Amended)   A device for controlling image encoding for use in a system provided with a plurality of encoding means for encoding a plurality of program data, each including image data, and multiplexing means for multiplexing output data of each of the encoding means, said ~~image encoding control apparatus~~ device controlling each of the encoding means by setting a target code rate to each of the encoding means as a target amount of codes to be generated per unit time, and comprising:

a temporary target-code-rate determining means for acquiring encoding difficulty which indicates difficulty in encoding for each program data, and for determining a temporary target code rate for each program data which corresponds to the acquired encoding difficulty for each program data by using a corresponding relationship between the encoding difficulty and a target code rate set for each program data; and

a target-code-rate correcting means for correcting the temporary target code rate determined by the temporary target-code-rate determining means in such a manner that the sum of the target code rates for each program data is within a specific allowable value range so as to determine a final target code rate for each program data, and for setting the final target rate to each of the encoding means.

2. (Original) A device for controlling image encoding according to claim 1 wherein the corresponding relationship between the encoding difficulty and the target code rate which is used in the temporary target-code-rate determining means is set in accordance with a maximum value, a minimum value and an average value of the target code rate predetermined for each program data and an average value of the encoding difficulty for each program data.

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3. (Original) A device for controlling image encoding according to claim 1 wherein the corresponding relationship between the encoding difficulty and the target code rate which is used in the temporary target-code-rate determining means is set in such a manner that the larger the encoding difficulty is, the larger the target code rate becomes, and that in a specific range in which the encoding difficulty is larger than an average value of the encoding difficulty, a target code rate corresponding to the same encoding difficulty is lowered as compared with a case in which the encoding difficulty and the target code rate have a proportional relationship, whereas in a specific range in which the encoding difficulty is smaller than the average value of the encoding difficulty, the target code rate corresponding to the same encoding difficulty is raised as compared with a case in which the encoding difficulty and the target code rate have a proportional relationship.

Claims 4-9 (Canceled)

10. (Original) A method for controlling image encoding for use in a system provided with a plurality of encoding means for encoding a plurality of program data, each including image data, and multiplexing means for multiplexing output data of each of the encoding means, in which a target code rate is set to each of the encoding means as a target amount of codes to be generated per unit time so as to control each of the encoding means, said image encoding control method including:

a temporary target-code-rate determining step for acquiring encoding difficulty which indicates encoding difficulty in encoding for each program data, and for determining a temporary target code rate for each program data which corresponds to the acquired encoding

difficulty for each program data by using a corresponding relationship between the encoding

difficulty and a target code rate set for each program data; and

a target-code-rate correcting step for correcting the temporary target code rate

determined in the temporary target code rate determining step in such a manner that the sum of

target code rates for each program data is within a specific allowable value range so as to

determine a final target code rate for each program data, and for setting the final target code rate

to each of the encoding means.

11. (Original) A method for controlling image encoding according to claim 10

wherein the corresponding relationship between the encoding difficulty and the target code rate

which is used in the temporary target-code-rate determining step is set in accordance with a

maximum value, a minimum value and an average value of the target code rate determined for

each program data and an average value of the encoding difficulty for each program data.

12. (Original) A method for controlling image encoding according to claim 10

wherein the corresponding relationship between the encoding difficulty and the target code rate

which is used in the temporary target-code-rate determining step is set in such a manner that the

larger the encoding difficulty is, the larger the target code rate becomes, and that in a specific

range in which the encoding difficulty is larger than an average value of the encoding difficulty,

a target code rate corresponding to the same encoding difficulty is lowered as compared with a

case in which the encoding difficulty and the target code rate have a proportional relationship,

whereas in a specific range in which the encoding difficulty is smaller than the average value of

the encoding difficulty, the target code rate corresponding to the same encoding difficulty is

raised as compared with a case in which the encoding difficulty and the target code rate have a

proportional relationship.

Claims 13-53 (Cancelled)